

Lives lived unconventionally connect author and readers

BY LAURA MOULTON
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

In the early 1990s, in Provo, Utah, I worked at the Food and Shelter Coalition, in a worn two-story white house with a square of grass in front. In the main room were tables covered in brightly patterned oilcloth, vases of plastic flowers on each. People came seeking meals, sack lunches or a voucher for emergency shelter at the dilapidated Hotel Roberts. They came by foot, or in listing RVs, or had hopped off a train and crossed the tracks into town. One man lived in a tent in the Wasatch Mountains, where he awaited revelation from God, and another, in his eighties, who squatted in a basement, rode a child's bike complete with a banana seat and tassels on the handlebars.

Everyone came from different places, some living outside by choice, and others gripped by addictions giving them the ride of their lives. But what they had in common when they stepped through the doors and sat down for a meal was that each knew what it was like to sleep outside, to wonder when and where they might eat next. They knew the particular brand of solitude offered by "no particular place to go." And they knew what it was like to be outside of the busy-ness of living, where people strode purposefully down sidewalks and climbed into cars and drove to jobs, and then repeated the process at the end of the day. Whatever their particular grief or haunting, whatever had brought them to the place they inhabited, they knew what it was like to be alone, and alone with their thoughts. It was enough to drive a body crazy, but it also offered a kind of trial by fire: if they could survive themselves, and that look down into their very core, then they could survive anything.

Two hundred miles of where we set the tables at the Food and Shelter Coalition, a man named Daniel Suelo was locked in the same trial with himself. He wished to climb out of the life he knew, with its preoccupation about making money to survive, and open himself up to something grander. In 1993, he typed a note to his friends that said he had "boycotted his native civilization and receded into the primitive desert lands of the Anasazi for a life of disciplined vision-quest."

The desert was Moab, Utah. He was not mentally ill and had no addictions, but knew that it was like to wrestle with his own thoughts, to be alone with himself and be dissatisfied by what he saw. Over the next decade, Suelo's longings to live outside the established system would take him in and out of jobs, states, countries, and end with him taking up residence in a cave in the desert. In 2000, he left his last thirty dollars at a pay phone and gave up money altogether.

Writer Mark Sundeen knew Daniel Suelo from the early days in Moab, after a stint together at a restaurant where they both worked as cooks. They had run in the same general crowd, a population more concerned with living well in the desert than with the business of making a living, and it didn't surprise Sundeen to hear of Suelo's attempts to live off the land. But when he heard Suelo had decided to quit money altogether, he figured it was a sign Suelo had finally gone a little mad. By now Sundeen was making money as a writer, had a house and had grown to appreciate creature comforts he'd eschewed in his past life. But when the economy tanked in 2008, with bad mortgages and speculation, the savings and pensions of millions of people disappeared, and Sundeen suddenly saw that Daniel Suelo might have a point when he said, "Money is an illusion." Where had all that money gone?

Mark Sundeen's quest to find Daniel Suelo again and to study the life he has chosen is the subject of his latest book, "The Man Who Quit Money." Part biography, part examination of economics and philosophy, the book traces Suelo's journey from his upbringing in a fundamentalist Christian home in Colorado, through college in Boulder, to a stint in the Peace Corps in Ecuador. Using correspondence from family and friends, Sundeen reconstructs Suelo's early days and the beginnings of his unconventional life. Sundeen also examines America's consumer-driven culture, and its apparent fear and distrust of any other kind of life. "Begging may be the most shameful act in

America," he writes. "It's how we define failure: if you don't work hard and get good grades, you'll end up on the street, panhandling for change." Sundeen cites examples of different Eastern religions in which holy men who have pledged to a life of poverty receive respect from their communities, in addition to the alms they are given. Daniel Suelo does not panhandle. He doesn't visit shelters for meals or lodging. But there is a kind of holiness in the foraging he does from nature, the meals he is able to create from a dumpster. "My philosophy is to use only what is freely given or discarded," he writes, "and what is already present and already running."

Not everyone need renounce all possessions and head for the desert. But *The Man Who Quit Money* suggests it might be useful to consider whether we really need everything we have. And perhaps those who accumulate fewer material possessions over their lifetimes should be respected rather than disdained. Suelo has said, "I don't expect everybody to live in a cave and Dumpster-dive. I do implore everybody to take only what they know in their own hearts that they need, and give up excess to those who have less than they need."

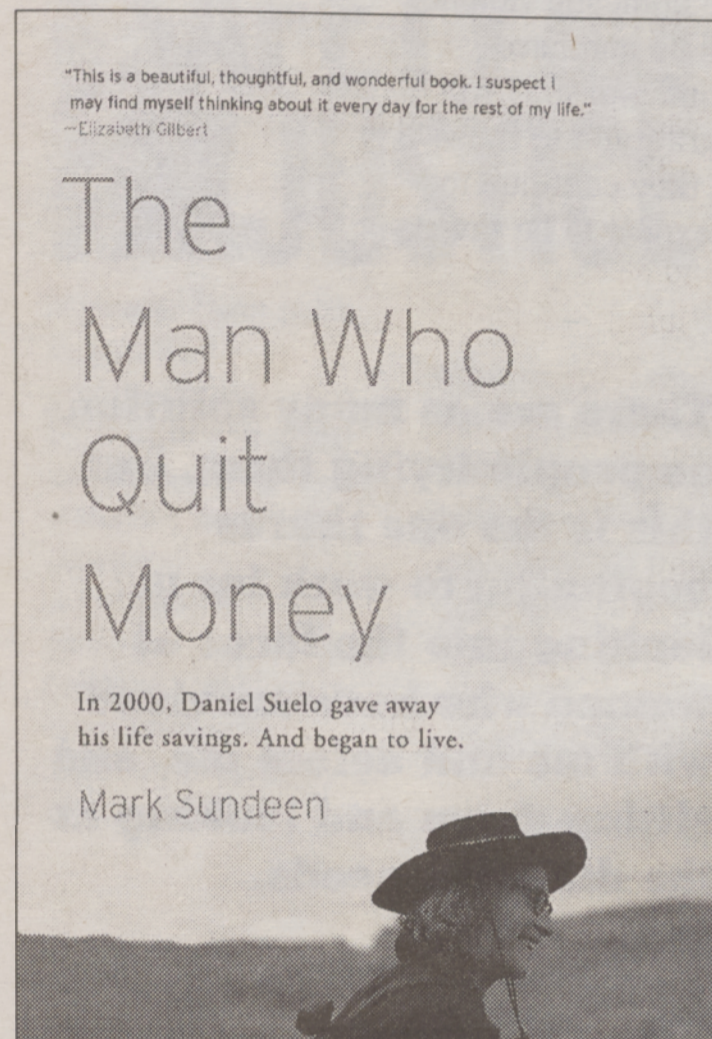
When Daniel Suelo agreed to go forward with Sundeen's book project, it was important to him that people who had no money to buy the book would still get a chance to read it. That is how Mark Sundeen came to contact Street Books, Portland's bicycle-powered mobile library that serves people living outside. "Could you offer the books to your patrons?" Sundeen wondered. His publisher sent us free copies of the book, and the first Street Books patron to read the book is Mark Hubbell, who said he enjoyed reading it, and wrote this summary:

"In this society where most of the national identity is enmeshed with the idea of material property (which the 14th Amendment guarantees), one man who believes that 'money is illusion and that attachment to that illusion makes us ill' has found what the oldest of civilizations have known all along, life simply is."

Laura Moulton is a writer and teacher in Portland. She is a street librarian at Street Books, a bicycle-powered mobile library, serving people who live outside. More information can be found at streetbooks.org.

Mark Sundeen and Daniel Suelo will be reading from *The Man Who Quit Money*, at Powells on Hawthorne, May 17 at 7:30.

Daniel Suelo writes a blog at zerocurrency.blogspot.com. Information about author Mark Sundeen can be found at marksundeen.com



The Man Who Quit Money, by Mark Sundeen

Finding a caring community keeps this vendor standing tall

BY MARLON CRUMP
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

"Community cannot feed for long on itself; it can only flourish with the coming of others from beyond, their unknown and undiscovered brothers."

— Howard Thurman,
American Theologian, clergyman and activist

We all somehow relate to life despite day-to-day activities or hardship. Be it a mother, a father, single parent, children, passerby, private citizen, prominent figure, public official, a hardworking employee, etc., and anyone in any form of struggle.

Eight months ago, I arrived here from San Francisco, Calif., with a goal and a priority: Peace of mind. Circumstances surrounding my work. Circumstances became too chaotic to withstand any longer. My greatest regret upon my retreat was leaving a very wonderful community of comrades who have more than made a positive difference in my life.

For the sake of my soul and sanity, I moved on to wholeheartedly heal from a darkness that was sparing my spirit:

"Don't let yesterday use up too much of today," goes the Cherokee proverb.

Almost immediately upon my arrival in August last year, I made a startling discovery of love and support from caring communities through Street Roots. As one of its street vendors who sell its paper on a daily basis, I've been extremely blessed to venture out into the community and meeting supportive people who've embraced me as part of their own.

"Collectively, we can begin to build towards real community change." Israel Bayer, director of Street Roots explains of the relationship it has with the community. "From a newspaper perspective we are changing the way people think about poverty and contributing to a larger conversation about solutions and hope."

The communities of Mississippi/Shaver, and employees in the Standard Insurance Building, located on Southwest Fourth Avenue and Taylor Street have become a major lifeline of ongoing support for me. Everyone from all walks of life who smiles genuinely in my direction showing respect equally earns mine, in gratitude. Even to those who quickly look away from me for

whatever reason, positive personalities parallel someone in need.

Supporters at times do U-turns after seeing and sensing a positive aura to make a donation, or share words of wisdom. Typically, I'm a human statue with a stance of a symbolic smile, exchanging its genuine energy to everyone who needs it, while holding a stack of Street Roots.

One of the primary perceptions people have of me surrounding ambition and success is in the pride in my appearance — in properly suited attire. Consistent compliments I receive ignite an energetic friendly feeling within me of appreciation for acceptance.

My darkest days are never lifted with a frown, as they stay smothered in my smile. Love is confirmed when people ask me how my day is going: whether the weather changes is to shine or shun us makes no difference, being our own breakfast and easing away any difficult or weary day, exchanging how we relate in some way shape or form through brief and lengthy conversations.

And at the same time, informing every single supporter of the content in the latest

edition.

"I have been a reader and supporter of Street Roots for a number of years," says Mary Anne Joyce, an employee of the Standard Insurance Building. "I read it because the journalism is great, and I read stories I would not read anywhere else." Joyce interacts with other Street Roots vendors and me in general.

"I especially like Marlon Crump who sells the paper at the building in which I work. He and I are from Cleveland, Ohio, which means we are friendly, and difficult to discourage."

Another supporter, Mary Hull, also an employee at the Standard Insurance Building, shares Joyce's similar sentiments. "I like Street Roots because it addresses topics that really matters (or should matter) to people who live or work in this city. There's nothing shallow in it, no 'fluff.' And it tries hard to give everyone a voice."

Real wealth in spirit is a welcoming community, a true legitimate level of love for everyone to hopefully reach at some point.

Marlon Crump is a Street Roots vendor who sells in downtown Portland near Southwest Fourth Avenue and Taylor Street.